

## 6

# PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

This chapter provides direction and policies to preserve open space, maintain existing parks, and augment the City's park and open space system.

## INTRODUCTION

Coon Rapids is blessed with an abundance of parks, open space, and trails. The City, Anoka County, Anoka-Hennepin School District No. 11, Anoka Ramsey Community College, and Epiphany School own various parts of the overall parks and open space system.

The system has been built over a period of about 60 years. The City undertook a comprehensive review of the aging system in the year 2000 in order to identify the replacement needs in the system and any remaining gaps in facilities. A major study was completed in 2001. A document entitled *Coon Rapids Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan* resulted from the study and was adopted by the City Council. The major findings and recommendations of that Plan are the foundation of this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. References will be made in this chapter to those parts of the 2001 Plan so that the reader can find more background and depth of analysis.

There are some minor differences between the 2001 Plan and this Parks and Open Space chapter of the Coon Rapids Comprehensive Plan. Where there are differences, the directions set forth here are the official City plans.

## FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The City's various park facilities serve different functions. The table below describes those functions.

**TABLE 6-1: Park Descriptions by Type**

CLASSIFICATION	DESCRIPTION
Mini and Neighborhood Park	<p>These parks are intended to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide neighborhood recreational facilities focused on un-structured individual and family activities.</li> <li>▪ Create a social center for the neighborhood.</li> <li>▪ Provide open space for informal group play and limited use for organized/programmed activities.</li> </ul>
Community Park	<p>These kinds of parks will, once developed, offer –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unique features that have City-wide appeal.</li> <li>▪ Opportunities to accommodate group facilities, such as larger picnic shelters.</li> </ul>

## Parks and Open Space

CLASSIFICATION	DESCRIPTION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A setting appropriate for facilities that are too costly to duplicate in more than one or two parks throughout the City.</li> </ul>
Youth Athletic Complex	This type of park is heavily programmed for youth programs. These parks include larger parking areas, restrooms, and concessions.
Community Athletic Complex	These facilities are used for organized adult recreational activities as well as youth activities. They include larger parking areas, restrooms, and concessions.
Community Preserve	These facilities have two primary functions – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preservation and protection of key natural areas and open spaces within the City.</li> <li>Creation of opportunities for human use and appreciation of the community's natural areas to a level that is appropriate for the site.</li> </ul>
Protected Open Space	These areas consist largely of protected lands such as wetlands and floodplains, and water bodies.  The primary difference between protected open space areas and community preserves lies in their level of ecological diversity and their level of development for human use (i.e., trails, overlooks, etc.). In general, the protected open space areas are less diverse and of lower ecological quality than community preserve sites and thus fall to a lower priority for restoration and management.
Special Use Park	These are unique facilities such as swimming pools, beaches, and the indoor hockey rink.
Regional Park	These parks serve a regional population. They also provide facilities that might otherwise be located in community parks.
School Site	These sites, except for Anoka Ramsey Community College and Epiphany School, are owned and controlled by Anoka-Hennepin School District # 11. However, they provide opportunities for joint use potential between the City and the schools.

## INVENTORY

### Parks

The table below contains a list of the various park and open space facilities, approximate natural and developed park acreage in each park, and the functional classification.

**TABLE 6-2: Park Acreage and Functional Classification**

MP=Mini Park, NP=Neighborhood Park, CP=Community Park, YAC=Youth Athletic Complex, CAC=Community Athletic Complex, SUP=Special Use Park, CPR=Community Preserve, RP=Regional Park, S/P=School/college grounds including buildings

Approximate Park Acreage

Name	Natural	Developed	Total	Classification
Acorn	0	1.5	1.5	MP
Al Flynn	16	18.3	34.3	YAC
Alder	0	2.6	2.6	NP
Aspen	10.5	8	18.5	YAC/CRP
Bison Creek	8.8	4	12.8	NP/CP
Burl Oaks	2	3.4	5.4	NP
Cardinal Woods	5	3.3	8.3	NP
Cook Ice Arena	3.2	4.8	8	SUP
Creekside	6.8	0	6.8	CPR
Crooked Lake Beach	0	8	8	SUP
Dahlia	0	8.1	8.1	NP

## Parks and Open Space

Name	Natural	Developed	Total	Classification
Delta	0	3	3	NP
Epiphany Pond	16	6	22	NP
Erlandson Nature Center	64	3	67	CP
Prairie Oaks	0	33.3	33.3	CP
Kennedy	.5	5	5.5	NP
Lions Coon Creek	25.3	10	35.3	NP/CP
Mallary	.1	3	3.1	NP
Marshland	20	10.7	30.7	NP/CP
Mason	0	6.4	6.4	NP
Mercy	.5	3.5	4	NP
Moor	6	21.1	27.1	NP/YAC
Nelson	0	3.9	3.9	NP
Parkside	8.6	4	12.6	NP/CP
Peppermint Stick	0	4	4	NP
Pheasant Ridge	23.3	8	31.3	NP/CP
Prospect	0	7.2	7.2	NP
Reservoir East	0	3	3	NP
Riverdale	0.0	5.0	5.0	NP
Riverview	0	20.5	20.5	YAC
Riverview Reservoir	0	18.5	18.5	NP
Riverwind	3	6.8	9.8	NP/SUP
Rockslide	0	12	12	NP
Sand Creek	15	58.5	73.5	CAC
Soccer Complex	5	35	40	CAC
Thorpe	.5	8	8.5	NP
Thrush	2	2	4	NP
Towerview	0	5	5	NP
Trackside	0	4.3	4.3	NP
Twin Field	3.5	3.5	7	NP
Vineyard	4	3.5	7.5	NP
Wilderness	73	0	73	CPR
Wildwood	15.7	3	18.7	NP/CP
Wintercrest	0	16	16	YAC
Woodcrest	32	8	40	NP/CP
Woodland Oaks and Heights	158	3	18.8	NP/CP
Woodview	0	10	10	NP
Bunker Hills Golf Course			350	SUP
Bunker Hills Regional Park – Anoka County			1500	RP
Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park – Anoka County			600	RP
Anoka-Ramsey Community College			≈100	S/P
Coon Rapids High School/Middle School			57*	S/P
Northdale Middle School/Eisenhower Elementary			57*	S/P
Sand Creek Elementary			10*	S/P
Mississippi Elementary			12*	S/P
Morris Bye Elementary			9*	S/P
Sorteberg Elementary			12*	S/P

## Parks and Open Space

Name	Natural	Developed	Total	Classification
Hoover Elementary			24*	S/P
Adams Elementary			10*	S/P
L.O. Jacob Elementary			15*	S/P
Hamilton Elementary			8*	S/P
Epiphany School (Private ball fields)			4*	S/P

\* Open space portion of the site only.

These facilities are shown on the accompanying Map P-1.

### Natural Areas

Many of the natural areas in the City have been purchased by the City or some other governmental agency for parks or open space preservation. Several other natural areas have been developed. Map P-2 shows the location of remaining privately owned open spaces in the City that have natural resource and ecological value.

### Protected Areas

Some of the natural areas shown on Map P-2 are protected by federal, state, or Coon Rapids regulations. These include those areas of the City that are floodplains, shorelands, or wetlands. The Mississippi River Critical Area requirements protect the Mississippi River and adjacent shorelands by requiring the review of new or additional development on land several blocks away from the river. All of the protected areas are shown on Map P-3. Map P-4 shows the preservation/development plan for the Coon Creek area between Main Street and Hanson Boulevard.

### Trails

The *Coon Rapids Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan* contains an extensive discussion of trails and their design standards in Section V. The table below is a brief summary of the major trail segments in Coon Rapids and their current development status.

**TABLE 6-3: Development Status**

Segment	Status
Coon Creek Regional Trail	50% complete
Sand Creek Trail	Completed
Mississippi River Regional Trail	The off-street branch of the trail is only 50% completed.
Coon Rapids Boulevard Trail	Asphalt and concrete. Needs upgrading.
Main Street (Northern Municipal Trail)	Only a few short segments of trail are completed

## NEEDS

The improvement needs for the parks and open space system are summarized in the table below. A more detailed needs analysis and survey of community residents can be found in Section 2 of the *Coon Rapids Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan*.

### Needs by Issue

**TABLE 6-4: Park System Needs Summary**

Issue	Summary Assessment
Overall Park Land Area	In general, the amount of land for parks, open space, and trails is adequate and appropriately located to service future needs. However, there are several natural resource areas such as along Coon Creek and Bison Creek that should be acquired or otherwise protected from urban development.  Cooperation between the City, school district and community college is needed so that the facilities and grounds are efficiently used and the purchase of additional land is not necessary.
Trail System	The City's trail system is very popular. It needs to be expanded along natural corridors and designed to form loops.
Overall Design	Design quality varies widely throughout the system. On the one hand, there are parks such as Lions Coon Creek Park that have a strong, cohesive design theme. On the other hand, there are many older parks that followed a common blueprint. These parks offer little to entice seniors or adults. They often lack internal loop trails for walking, a very popular activity for older residents.
Aesthetic Quality	While existing parks are not unsightly, they are often lacking in design quality. Upgraded design quality is necessary to encourage an aging population to use the parks.
Condition	There is a need to upgrade and replace worn-out facilities in all parks.
Recreation Facility Mix	It is important that neighborhood parks are preserved for less intensive activities. High traffic generating and noisy activities should be accommodated at the City's designated athletic fields. Generally, there is not too much pressure to use the neighborhood parks for more intensive activities.
Natural Resource Quality	Some portions of existing parks should be more natural in character. That generally means less or no mowing and no active uses. There are other natural areas in the City that should be purchased or otherwise preserved. These areas should then be left in their natural condition or reclaimed to function in their original natural manner.

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

In order to address system needs, the City has adopted the following goals, objectives, and policies. There are four major goals and corresponding objectives and policies.

**Goal #1: Park Functions - A City with parks and preserved natural areas for recreational uses that provide visual and physical diversions from the developed residential, commercial, and industrial environment, and as a means to maintain the character, ambiance, appearance, and history of the community.**

Objectives:

- 1-1. Fulfill the present and future physical and psychological needs of residents and enhance the quality of life within the City with park land and natural resource areas.

## **Parks and Open Space**

- 1-2. Develop parks and natural resource areas and interconnected trail corridors that are significant factors in shaping future growth in Coon Rapids.
- 1-3. Emphasize orderly and sequential growth in a compact urban form that is in harmony with the natural environment.

### **Policies:**

- 1-1. The City shall use park land dedication policies and ordinances to require each developer (of all land use categories) to dedicate land or, at the discretion of the City, an equivalent cash value contribution for parks acquisition and development.
- 1-2. The City shall consider acquisition of specific parcels of land for park uses based on the quality of the land and natural resource, its suitability for the desired uses, and its location as defined in the Plan (or accepted alternative). Undesirable land parcels with limited park and resource value shall not be accepted.
- 1-3. The City shall acquire and develop parks, natural resource areas, and related recreation facilities in accordance with this Plan for the purpose of shaping the built form of the community and establishing a balance between urbanization parks, trail corridors, and natural areas.
- 1-4. The City reserves the right to acquire land within all development areas for park and trail purposes. This includes land acquired through dedication or direct purchase by the City.
- 1-5. The City shall base park development standards on the principle of providing and maintaining quality parks and facilities.
- 1-6. The City shall make a reasonable and ongoing effort shall to eliminate all physical barriers that deter individuals from using existing or future parks and recreation facilities. Barrier-free design principles shall be implemented in accordance with accepted guidelines and laws.
- 1-7. The City shall be consistent in design and maintenance procedures with accepted industry standards and be clearly defined and adopted. Design and maintenance of all parks and recreation facilities shall emphasize high quality, user safety, and cost accountability.
- 1-8. The Parks and Recreation Commission and staff shall review and comment on all planned development matters that impact park land and trail corridor dedication, acquisition, and development.

- 1-9. The City will take steps to improve overall park design quality throughout the system without all parks having identical elements. Efforts will be made to design parks so they entice seniors and adults, as well as children, to use them.

### **Goal #2: Natural Resources - Preservation and conservation of ecological systems and natural resources within the City.**

#### Objectives:

- 2-1. Preserve significant natural resources as open space and important components of the overall park system.
- 2-2. Enhance the character or appeal of the community through interconnected natural resource areas.
- 2-3. Emphasize the orderly and sequential growth within the community in a compact form in harmony with the natural environment.
- 2-4. Provide sustainable and desirable natural resource areas and ecological systems.

#### Policies:

- 2-1. The City will restore or manage natural resource areas identified in this Plan to enhance and protect them.
- 2-2. The City will provide educational materials for residents so they can be informed about ecological issues and the importance of restoration and management programs and their role in protecting the City's natural resources and the natural character of their properties.
- 2-3. The City may, at its discretion, set aside natural resource areas through direct purchase, developer's agreements, conservation easements, or other means to preserve the natural character of the community. These areas shall be considered as additions to, rather than substitutes for, other types of park land.
- 2-4. The City's wetland and shoreland management policies and practices, including a 25-foot wetland buffer, will be consistent with accepted statewide standards.

### **Goal #3: Trails - An interconnected trail and sidewalk system for transportation and recreation purposes and as a means to tie divergent parks and open space with the broader community.**

## **Parks and Open Space**

### Objectives:

- 3-1. Develop a trail system that emphasizes harmony with the built and natural environment.
- 3-2. Provide relatively uninterrupted pleasure hiking, biking, and other uses to and through the City's park system and developed areas.
- 3-3. Provide a well connected, comprehensive park and trail system with an emphasis on enhancing the recreational experience of the use. Also, a trail system connected to trails in adjacent cities and the county.
- 3-4. Maintain safe trail system where users are protected from urban developmental encroachment and associated vehicular traffic.

### Policies:

- 3-1. The City will require developers to dedicate land for trails when the developed land contains an identified trail corridor. The developers will also be required to provide access from new subdivisions to those trails.
- 3-2. The City shall develop in conjunction with future developments, parks, natural resource areas, greenways, and roadway projects to provide transportation throughout the City and for recreation purposes.
- 3-3. The City shall develop the trail system, including tunnels under railroad tracks and overhead bridges over Highway 10, to minimize the potential for conflicts between pedestrians and motor vehicles.
- 3-4. The City shall require trail types, development standards, and general location to be in accordance with the Plan. The trail system shall accommodate a range of activities (e.g. walking, hiking, bicycling, in-line skating and cross country skiing).
- 3-5. The City shall provide trail support facilities as warranted (including trail signage and striping, benches, picnic tables, bridges, restrooms, parking, shelters, etc.).
- 3-6. The City shall ensure trail design sensitive to the natural environment and character of the area it traverses.
- 3-7. The City shall design trails to be accessible to all populations with varying abilities wherever feasible, practical, and appropriate given the specific setting. Principles of universal design shall also be applied.

- 3-8. The City shall construct trails to require minimal maintenance and limit the opportunity for vandalism.
- 3-9. The City shall provide adequate screening and buffering, where possible, along trail corridors to provide a physical and psychological separation between the trail and adjacent land uses.
- 3-10. The City shall prohibit motorized vehicles on all trails unless required for maintenance and safety.

**Goal #4: Programs - Opportunity for all community residents to participate in recreation activities and programs through well-designed, effective, and interesting recreation programs.**

Objectives:

- 4-1. Support the efforts of local recreational providers in addressing the recreation needs and desires of all segments of the community including children, teens, adults, elderly, and the disabled.
- 4-2. Support and encourage a wide diversity of recreation interests within the community.
- 4-3. Provide adequate facilities for programmed use on a fair and equitable basis to ensure that all individuals and groups receive equal access to facilities.

Policy:

- 4-1. The City shall use the Facility Type and Location Guidelines on pages 4.134 and 4.135 of the *Coon Rapids Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan* to assure that facilities are appropriately located so as not to overburden parks with activities that are too intensive for the intended purpose of the park.

## FUTURE PLAN

The City will make few additions to the parks system in the future except for the acquisition of land for trail expansion and the possible acquisition of natural areas. Map P-5 shows the envisioned parks and trail systems.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The City will use a combination of regulations, routine maintenance, and capital improvements to implement the *Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan*.

## **Parks and Open Space**

### **Regulations**

The City will use its subdivision regulations and zoning code to safeguard natural areas, protection areas, and the Mississippi River Critical Area. All of the regulations are in place to facilitate the protection.

### **Maintenance**

Annual maintenance and repair will be used to keep the City's parks in good, safe condition. Funds are available from the City's general fund and park dedication fees to provide for maintenance and repair.

### **Capital Improvements**

Large scale rehabilitation or development of park space, as well as acquisition of land for trail expansion, will be done through the City's capital improvement program. Major improvements that are envisioned include the following:

1. Sand Creek Park major renovation
2. Cook Ice Arena (major renovation or reconstruction in new location)
3. Bunker Hills restaurant facility
4. Three tunnels under railroad tracks for pedestrian trails
5. Pedestrian bridge over Highway 10 north of the high school football field